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## Re-reading the Past and the Desire to Construct Identity in *King Horn*: A Freudian Perspective

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**Abstract:** With the coming of the 13<sup>th</sup> century and the development of the genre of Middle English romance, writers started to develop new ways of elucidating material. The actions, motives, and states of mind started to be scrutinized in a way that reflects a new psychological awareness. One of the earliest Middle English Romances, *King Horn* represents the genre's shift to the individual through celebrating the growth of its protagonist from dependence to independence. Choosing a generic plot that evolves from descent to ascent, *King Horn* synchronizes between the psychological and social development of the hero's personality, the thematic development of events and the stylistic development of its narrative structure. The psychological dimension of the relationship between time and growth makes analyzing *King Horn* from a Freudian point of view useful. The aim of this paper is to explore the construction of identity in *King Horn* as a re-reading and a misreading of the past. The paper will analyze the development of Horn's identity and the identity of the genre of the Middle English romance in the light of Sigmund Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 'Family Romance,' and Harold Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence*.

This paper argues that Horn's desire to construct an independent identity is represented as a motivation to re-read and misread the history of his father, King Murray, in an attempt to deviate from it. Drawing upon narrative details which launch a comparison between the young heir and his father, this paper proposes that the poet juxtaposes the deeds of the son and the father to highlight the eminence of the hero of his narrative. On a larger scale the paper suggests that the development of the genre of the Middle English romance in general and *King Horn* in particular can be viewed as a result of misreading older genres and poems. Additionally, the paper will show that the complex relationship between the present's search for identity and the past is created in *King Horn* through a dream motif. In addition to its cultural function as a prophetic message from God, dream in *King Horn* works as a venting of Horn's suppressed emotions. Accordingly, dream in this medieval romance can be read as a mechanism of emotional discharge, providing the protagonist with the context through which he can recall the traumatic memory of the past and overcome it in a way that enhances growth. In its investigation of the relationship between time and growth, this paper provides a new reading of the phenomenology of time. Analyzing Horn's subjective experience of maturation and the construction of his identity as a result of re-reading the past recalls Heidegger's phenomenological connection between remembrance and the creation of community. Exploring the relationship between Horn's personal memory and the communal memory alludes to the phenomenological understanding of how the individual and the world are mutually constitutive.

**Keywords:** Identity, Memory, Desire, Freud, Medieval Romance



The liberation of an individual, as he grows up, from the authority of his parents is one of the most necessary though one of the most painful results brought about by the course of his development.

—Sigmund Freud<sup>1</sup>

According to Freud, in his book ‘Family Romances,’ liberation from the parents’ authority is essential to both the formation of the individual’s identity and the progress of society. In early childhood, the individual’s parents are the only authority that he/she knows. However, as the child grows up, intellectually he/she begins to view his/her parents critically in an attempt to be independent from them. The oedipal complex motivates the son to seek independence from the father, and even to rival and surpass him. Apparently, the father is targeted more than the mother; Freud states that ‘a boy is far more inclined to feel hostile impulses towards his father than towards his mother and has a far more intense desire to get free from *him* than from *her*’.<sup>2</sup>

In *The Anxiety of Influence*, which is heavily influenced by Freud’s ‘Family Romances,’ Bloom argues that the relationship between a poet and his precursor is analogous to the relationship between a father and his son in a family romance.<sup>3</sup> In fact, this relationship is characterised by anxiety on the son’s behalf. In the same way in which the son has an anxiety of being castrated by his father so does the ephebe, ‘the young poet’, feel towards his precursor. In order to overcome his precursor and clear an imaginative space for himself, the ephebe tries to rival and surpass his precursor. Both the son’s attempt to surpass his father and the ephebe poet’s attempt to surpass the precursor, are important in terms of achieving development. As Bloom puts it:

Poetic Influence—when it involves two strong, authentic poets—always proceeds by a misreading of the prior poet, an act of creative correction that is actually and necessarily a misinterpretation. The history of fruitful poetic influence, which is to say the main traditions of Western poetry since the Renaissance, is a history of anxiety and self-saving caricature of

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<sup>1</sup> Sigmund Freud, ‘Family Romances’ in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume IX (1906-1908): Jensen’s ‘Gradiva’ and Other Works*, eds. James Strachey and Anna Freud (London: Hogarth Press, 1959), pp. 235-242 (p. 237).

<sup>2</sup> Freud, ‘Family Romance’, p. 237.

<sup>3</sup> Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 8.

distortion, of perverse, willful revisionism without which modern poetry as such could not exist.<sup>4</sup>

What Bloom suggests is that new poems are dependent on old poems, although they are created through misinterpreting the older ones. The son's struggle for independence from his father and the young poet's struggle for independence from the older poet are both struggles motivated by desire. It is not simply the desire to retell, but to retell differently and independently from the original story.

This relationship between sons and fathers, ephebes and precursors, and the present and the past can be better understood in the light of Freud's theory of dream. In his attempt to achieve independence, the son's imagination becomes engaged in the task of breaking free from the parents and this happens through daydreaming.<sup>5</sup> The fact that the dream's material usually includes a memory of an earlier experience from which proceeds a wish suggests that dreams participate in the individual's formation of identity. Since dreaming, whether actual or daydreaming, helps the dreamer overcome a traumatic memory, it enables the dreamer's growth towards maturity.

The aim of this paper is to explore the construction of identity in *King Horn* as a re-reading and a misreading of the past. The paper will analyse the development of Horn's identity and the identity of the genre of the Middle English romance in light of Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 'Family Romance,' and Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence*. The paper mainly argues that Horn's desire to construct an independent identity is represented as a motivation to re-read and misread the history of his father, King Murray in an attempt to deviate from it. Drawing upon narrative details which launch a comparison between the young heir and his father, this paper proposes that the poet juxtaposes the deeds of the son and the father to highlight the eminence of the hero of his narrative. On a larger scale, the paper suggests that the development of the genre of the Middle English romance in general and *King Horn* in particular can be viewed as a result of misreading older genres and poems. Additionally, the paper will show that the complex relationship between the present's search for identity and the past is created in *King Horn* through a dream motif. In addition to its cultural function as a prophetic message from God, dream in *King Horn* works as a venting of Horn's suppressed emotions. Accordingly, dream in this medieval romance can be read as a mechanism of emotional discharge. It provides the protagonist with the context

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<sup>4</sup> Bloom, p. 30.

<sup>5</sup> Freud, 'Family Romances', p. 238.



through which he can recall the traumatic memory of the past and overcome it in a way that enhances growth.

After describing King Murray's tragic fighting scene, the poet presents us with Horn's victorious fighting scene in a similar context. In *Westernesse*, Horn, like his father, is depicted as riding by the sea shore when he sees Saracen ships. He addresses them in order to establish their intentions and is consequently answered by the Saracen that 'Þis lond we wulle3 wynne / And sle þat þer [beþ] inne' (609-10).<sup>6</sup> Picturing these two scenes so as to have very similar circumstances but drastically different outcomes, the poet obviously establishes a comparison between the father and the son. While both are surprised by the Saracens in the analogous situation, Horn is depicted as being far more prepared than his father, and this is emphasised. Horn's father, along with two men, is presented as unable to defeat the Saracens because 'So fele mi3ten [eþe] /Bringe hem þre to d[e]þe!' (59-60). However, Horn, by himself, kills more than one hundred, protects his life, and the land 'He slo3 þer on haste, / On Hundred bi þe laste,/Ne mi3te noman telle/þat folc þat he gan quelle' (621-24). The fact that Horn's strength withstands the many Saracens is also highlighted in his second fight with the giant. While King Thurston decides that three men should confront the giant, Horn regards this as an underestimation of his capability to fight with the giant alone:

Sire King, hit nis no ri3te/ On wiþ þ[r]e to fi3te/ A 3en [es] one hunde, / þre cristen[e] to fonde. / [Ac King], ischall al -one, / Wiþute more ymone, / [Mid] mi swerd wel eþe /Bringe hem þre to deþe (847-54).

Similar to the first fight scene, the poet emphasises how Horn prepares for the fight. In fact, the poet links Horn's strength to his desire for Rymenhild: 'He lokede on þe ringe/ And on Rimenilde [þe 3inge] / He slo3 þer on haste' (619-21). In addition to its function as a reminder to return home within the seven years, the ring endows Horn with strength as a result of thinking of Rymenhild. In 'Magic and Christianity', Corrine Saunders argues that the emotional impact of the ring surpasses its magical quality:

While Rymenhild emphasizes the magical quality of the ring, the point of the ring is to be quite other. The ring is engraved with the name Rymenhild the young and she has told him that the magic will work only if he looks on it and thinks of her. The emphasis is on the strength he gains as a result of thinking of Rymenhild rather than on the magic inherent in the object itself, the impact of the ring comes as a result of the inspiration

<sup>6</sup> *King Horn*, An Edition Based on Cambridge University Library Gg. 4.27 (New York: Garland Publishing, 1984).



provided by the beloved.<sup>7</sup>

In fact, the impact of the ring on Horn's victory in the battlefield shows how romance literature establishes a relationship between the hero's romantic love, the mechanisms of desire, and the hero's physical strength.

It could be argued that King Murray not only lost a fight and his land, but also that he lost history – a story. Although when living he was described as an example of prowess, King Murray's defeat and death meant the end of his military career. Had he been victorious he could have been the hero of a poem immortalising his heroic deeds rather than playing only a minor role in the tale of his son. *King Horn* includes the story of King Murray to show that the story of Horn begins where his father's story ends. This aspect of the relationship between the father and the son is realised through the structure and themes of the poem. The story begins and ends in Suddene, where King Murray loses his kingdom at the very beginning and Horn builds his at the end of the story. The idea that the son makes up for his father's loss is emphasised by the author: 'Horn let [sone] w[e]rche /chapeles and ch[e]rche. / Belles he dede ringe, /And [prestes] mass[e] singe' (1411-14). Contrary to his father, whose defeat has caused an overall downfall, Horn's victory constitutes a re-staging of joy represented mainly by re-building churches and chapels. Accordingly, stressing the father's defeat is meant to highlight the importance of the son's victory. This literary immortalisation of Horn's story shows that his victory not only establishes him as a hero in the battlefield, but also as a narrative hero.

The actual and moral triumph of Horn over his father can be better understood by referencing Freud's 'Family Romances' and Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence*. King Murray is not only important to Horn as a king figure, but also as a father figure. The authority that King Murray has as a father and a king makes him the source of all beliefs for his son.<sup>8</sup> Yet, to portray his protagonist as a larger than life character, the poet gives Horn an excuse to renounce his father's authority. The collapse of the perfect image of the father is significant to Horn's personality development as a potential king. Although Horn is characterised as being obliged to be independent from his father, he is portrayed as willing to surpass him. Here, it is important to note that a child's tendency to achieve independence from his father is usually preceded by a deviance from the usual relation between the father

<sup>7</sup> Corrine Saunders, 'Magic and Christianity' in *Christianity and Romance in Medieval England*, ed. Rosalind Field et al. (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2010), pp. 84-100 (p. 90).

<sup>8</sup> See Freud's 'Family Romance', p. 236.

and his son.<sup>9</sup> For Horn to allow himself to seek independence, rival his father, and even surpass him, he must first be skeptical about the heroic image of his father so as to cease imitating him as a model. While the beginning of the poem paints King Murray as someone who has always been an example of heroism, the rest of the poem reveals that the defeat of the father is significant to the son's personality development. Therefore, King Murray's defeat can be seen as a deviance in Horn's family romance that allows him to think of his father's deed as less heroic than expected; indeed, this consequently triggers Horn's determination to surpass him and make up for his defeat. As a result of the son's longing for the vanished days where his father was the strongest, he develops a need to replace his father with another. Consequently, to compensate for his father's lack of heroism, the son feels the need to replace the original father with other father figures who are more superior and heroic.<sup>10</sup>

In *King Horn* there are different characters who are presented as potential father figures, namely King Aylmar and King Thurston. Although a surface reading may view those kings as potential father figures for Horn, a thorough one reveals that both kings fail to perform this duty. In fact, the idea of medieval royal wardship, through which a royal orphan heir becomes the ward of another lord until he grows up, is relevant here.<sup>11</sup> Although wardship is a dominant theme in medieval romance, Horn's survival and success in regaining his kingdom are not attributed to a certain character's protection. Instead, Horn's survival and success are attributed to his identity characteristics, namely his divine appearance and prowess. While Horn's mother is presented as a passive character who does not make any attempt to protect her son, other male characters fail to fulfil their paternal functions as guardians or step fathers. Gary Lim in 'In the Name of the Dead Father: Reading Fathers and Sons in *Havelok the Dane*, *King Horn*, and *Bevis of Hampton*' argues that Horn 'encounters authority figures in his adventures who act as fathers, and whom he must either overcome or win independence from en route to regaining his inheritance and identity'.<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, both kings are depicted as deepening Horn's search for independence. To reflect his failure to perform an effective paternal role, the poem presents King Aylmar as the reason behind Horn's second exile. After commenting on King Aylmar's treatment of Horn as a foundling, Lim explains that 'if Aylmar acknowledges that Horn is his favourite ward—he calls him 'mi derling''.<sup>13</sup> As for King Thurston's role, he is

<sup>9</sup> Freud, 'Family Romance', p. 236.

<sup>10</sup> Freud, 'Family Romance', pp. 237-238.

<sup>11</sup> See Paul Newman, *Growing up in the Middle Ages* (North Carolina: McFarland Company, 2007), p. 277.

<sup>12</sup> Lim, 'In the Name of the Dead Father: Reading Fathers and Sons in *Havelok the Dane*, *King Horn*, and *Bevis of Hampton*', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 110(2011), pp. 22-52 (p. 40).

<sup>13</sup> Lim, p. 40.



portrayed as being in need of Horn's protection, not the other way around. After losing his two sons, he indirectly threatens Horn's freedom and independence by asking him to marry his daughter and to be his heir. However, struggling for independence, Horn refuses his offer in a way which reflects his aim, namely to clear a patriarchal space for himself. Horn's ultimate goal is to prove himself worthy of the throne and to win it through his individual prowess, not through inheritance. Refusing to marry the two kings' daughters before becoming a king himself, Horn rejects the throne through heredity or marriage.


In fact, the absence of an effective biological father in addition to Horn's attempt to overcome other father figures is suggestive. One of the major themes of this medieval romance is Horn's identity formation. Lim asserts that 'Aylmar represents the problematic father figure that must ultimately be left behind if Horn is to succeed in regaining his patrimony and identity'.<sup>14</sup> In fact, Horn establishes himself as an independent individual very early in the poem in a way that foreshadows a potential predominance over his father. When he survives and gives his first speech, he never mentions his father or laments his death. Instead, Horn speaks like a leader who promises to avenge his people, not as a son who wants to avenge his father. Additionally, when King Aylmar asks him about his name, instead of relying on his father's fame he identifies himself as "Horn" in a way that shows a great deal of personality and independence 'Horn ihc am ihote,/Icomen vt of bote/Fram þe se side' (207-9). Horn's sense of identity is the characteristic that enables him to carry the responsibility of himself and his companions who recognise him as a ruler very early in the poem. He speaks for them using collective pronouns and even makes decisions for them: 'Nu þu m[a3e] vs slen and binde /Ore honde [n vs] bihynde,/ [Ac] 3ef hit beo pi wille,/Helpe þat we ne spille' (197-200).

This independence from the father is not only recognised at the thematic level, but also at the narrative level. Horn's struggle to be independent is typical of the rebellion of the new generation against the previous generation. Horn's independence suggests a deviance from the father's story, a rebelling against the ending of the story of the father, and a misreading, which makes it clear that the story of the son can never be similar to the story of the father. Although this is foreshadowed early in the poem, it is not until the fighting scene that the rivalry between son and father is made clear. The careful plotting of Horn's first fighting scene, with similar circumstances but different outcomes, suggests that the author imagines Horn's story as a retelling of the father's story, but with different results. The drastically different endings suggest that this scene can be viewed as a re-

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<sup>14</sup> Lim, p. 41.





reading of the father's scene. Although Horn does not comment on his father's defeat, he is constantly depicted as being haunted by his father's history. His insistence on achieving victory on the battlefield as a way of proving his capability can be viewed as a reaction to his father's defeat. Accordingly, Horn's success and his predominance are linked to achieving a better ending – a successful re-reading of the father's story. Both structurally and thematically, Horn's story of victory can be seen as a re-reading of King Murray's defeat story. In order for Horn to have a story of his own where he is the hero, the author pushes his father to the background.

On a larger scale, the story of *King Horn* not only immortalises Horn over his father but also immortalises the author of *King Horn* over any previous authorial attempts to tell the story of King Murray. Consequently, the poet of *King Horn* can be seen as a reader of a previous similar story. Indeed, this seems like the story of King Murray which apparently did not reach us – a person who has tried to clear an imaginative space for himself, overcome the anxiety of influence, and misread the precursor's poem to create the poem of the son. If Horn's deviance from his father's story can be seen as symbolic of the new generation's rebellion against the previous generation, the new trend of writing represented by *King Horn* in particular and the genre of the Middle English romance in general can be seen as the rebellion of a genre against a previous genre. The notable style and content of the Middle English romance that differentiate it from the old French romances and the Anglo-Norman texts result in a change of genre, from the *chanson de geste* to romance. In this way, the new genre can be viewed as a result of misreading the previous one; as Bloom puts it, 'Poetry is the anxiety of influence, is misprision, is a disciplined perverseness. Poetry is misunderstanding, misinterpretation, misalliance. Poetry (Romance) is Family Romance'.<sup>15</sup> This way of re-reading and misreading a father's story, a poet, a previous genre, is an act of 'creative correction' which is inevitably necessary for both the development of the of the individual's identity and the continuous production of remarkable poetry.<sup>16</sup> The development of identity in *King Horn* is not only achieved thematically, but also stylistically. While the father's story is presented as a dead history of defeat, the son's story is presented as a living exercise of triumph. The father's story is told in the past and he is not given a voice. On the other hand, Horn's adventures are not only narrated by the narrator, but also by him, and sometimes by other characters. Horn is given a voice to retell his adventures in a way which shows

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<sup>15</sup> Bloom, p. 95.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. p. 30.



that his predominance over his father is stressed through language, telling and retelling.

The complex web of relationships between the past and present, beginning and ending, and finally the desire for identity and its fulfilment is created in *King Horn* through a dream motif. The story includes two dreams, the first of which is Rymenhild's, and it takes place in the first part of the narrative; the other is Horn's dream, which takes place in the last part of the narrative. In fact, Rymenhild's and Horn's dreams are thematically related and they connect the plot. Rymenhild's dream of losing her fish after a big fish bursts her net can certainly be seen as meaningful, but only if read in relation to Horn's dream that reveals Fikenhild's treachery. In line 1443, Horn dreams that Rymenhild is forced onto a ship by Fikenhild: 'Pat ni3t [gan Horn] swete/And h[ard]e forte mete/Of Rymenild his make/ Into schupe was itake/be schup [g]an [ouer]blenche/ His lemman scholde adrenche' (1443-8). In fact, Horn's dream connects the present with the past, and links the present revelation of his friend's treachery with the previous warning of Rymenhild's prophetic dream, which took place very early on in the poem. While Rymenhild's dream carries erotic symbolism related to fish and fishing, Horn's dream is structurally more important. Placed near the end of the narrative, Horn's dream can be seen as suspending time in a moment where the past and present hold together in the metaphor of the dream. It simply links the history of Horn's wish to be mature and independent and the impact of this wish on the lovers' desires to be united with the present outcomes of these desires. Additionally, embedded in Horn's dream are the complications that have delayed the fulfilment of these wishes and desires.

Horn's dream of revelation ties together all the loose ends of the narrative, where the sense of ending is related to the sense of beginning. Building on Freud's belief that every dream represents an impulse of early childhood,<sup>17</sup> Horn's dream about drowning reminds us of his childhood experience when he came close to death in the water. Horn's fear of drowning is only mentioned at the very beginning and in the context of the dream. Although the dream shows that Horn is afraid for his beloved, the similarity between the two scenes suggests that Horn's traumatic experience, and his subsequent fear of drowning, are disguised through the symbolism of the dream. Here, the context of the dream gives Horn the opportunity to employ displacement unconsciously and assign his past fears to someone else, apparently Rymenhild. The opportunity to live a past experience through dream, as well as to displace and fulfil a wish serves Horn's search for

<sup>17</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. A. A. Brill (New York: Courier Dover Publications, 2015), p. 219.



identity. Horn's dream projects into the shape of a story – the changing responses to his own traumatic conflicts of the past. With the elements of recent provocation and traces of his old memory, Horn's dream represents an expression of the past repressed emotions.

The dream's impact of connecting the present with the past is also achieved structurally. It is through Horn's dream, and its disclosure of Fikenhild's treachery, that Rymenhild's dream can make sense to Horn and to the reader. Although the reader is prepared to expect such treachery from Fikenhild, it is not actually established until the very end. *King Horn* begins and ends with metaphors; indeed, the closure metaphor sums up the whole story that came before and signals the development that has taken place. While the context of Rymenhild's dream depicts Horn as blind to Fikenhild's treachery, the context of his dream shows that he has developed into an active responsible knight and king who knows his enemy. Commenting on Horn's personality development, Georgina Ziegler shows that Horn develops from being the fish to the net to the fisher of his net: 'if Horn now is the fish to be caught in the net, he is later the fisher who comes to rescue Rymenhild'.<sup>18</sup>

The fact that Horn's long awaited action is triggered by a dream suggests that the context of the dream, like the context of psychotherapy, provides a solution to the traumatic memory of the dreamer. Analogous to the situation of psychotherapy which gives the patient the chance to express his/her free associations without the censorship of the ego or the superego, the context of the dream in *King Horn* gives Horn the opportunity to express his childhood fear of drowning. In such similar circumstances, the patient is given the opportunity to influence the past and thus re-determines its meaning. Likewise, the dream situation gives Horn the opportunity to express an unconscious fear of a past traumatic event and retells it in the language of the present in a way that ensures development.

Once narrated to the audience, Horn's dream introduces a third memory, the memory of the reader, and Horn's personal memory of the dream becomes a communicative one. In the light of Carruthers's description of the medieval understanding of reading as "a hermeneutical dialogue between two memories"<sup>19</sup>, Horn's dream vision, as a cultural motif, helps deepen the imaginative world the author has created in a way that engages the memory of the reader. The literal and moral triumph of Horn over the sea helps to alter the memory of the reader. Instead

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<sup>18</sup> Ziegler, Georgianna, 'Structural Repetition in King Horn,' *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 81 (1980), pp.403-408 (p. 407).

<sup>19</sup> Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 211.

of remembering Horn as a weak fearful child, the audience can now remember him as a strong determined adult who not only survives the sea but who also survives other similar threats. The dream's presentation of the emotion of fear along with the reversal impact of this fear, suggest that Horn's dream and its consequences represent a restatement of the past traumatic events. Speaking the language of the medieval culture through its medieval symbolism, Horn's dream and its consequences can be seen as a retelling that affects Horn's memory and the reader's memory of the past traumas. Consequently, the dream motif in *King Horn* shows that, in the literary and artistic production, the narrative memory of the text can be seen as recalling the cultural memory of the audience.

Yet, in order to engage the reader's memory, the dream material must fit the audience's cultural imagination. In fact, Horn's dream material is not only drawn from the autobiographical memory of the author, but also from the collective memory of the medieval culture. Emphasising dream in this way, *King Horn* reflects the place held by dream within the cultural imagination. Rymenhild's and Horn's great concern with the message of their dreams reflects the cultural imagination of the medieval period which views dream as a way to converse with the divine. In "Dream Poetry", Helen Philips states that "medieval dream poetry is rooted in classical and biblical concepts of dream and vision that imbued dreaming with the potential for august, profound, even divine meaning".<sup>20</sup> The fact that both Rymenhild and Horn's dreams are depicted as being fulfilled reflects the medieval society's perception of dream as a sign from God. In 'Dreaming in the Middle Ages', Steven Kruger explains that the writers of the high and late Middle Ages 'claimed that dreams could be divinely inspired and foretell the future'.<sup>21</sup> Employing dream in this way and drawing upon the medieval culture's mythical past is achieved to add artistic merit to the poem in a way that appeals to the audience. Freud maintains that 'myths ... are the distorted vestiges of the wishful fantasies of whole nations, the *secular dreams* of youthful humanity'.<sup>22</sup> The place held by dream in the medieval culture shows that the dream motif in *King Horn* is not only a literary device used to build curiosity and suspense in the reader, but that it also has a cultural dimension.

The growth that Horn's dream metaphor suggests is not only thematic, but also stylistic. By the time Horn's dream is represented, the narrative has reached a point at which it has been delayed enough to reach a meaningful closure. This, in

<sup>20</sup> Peter Brown, *A Companion to Medieval English Literature and Culture C.1350-C.1500* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2009), p. 374.

<sup>21</sup> Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 7.

<sup>22</sup> Freud, 'Creative Writers and Daydreaming' in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume 9*, ed. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1959), pp. 146-153 (p. 152).





fact, applies to the events of the whole narrative, which can only be read meaningfully if read in anticipation of the endings that give them order and significance.<sup>23</sup> The unconscious wishes that the text of *King Horn* addresses are the factors that cause formal movement from past to present and from dependence to independence. In his attempt to achieve his major quest, Horn is depicted as being caught in a series of trials ranging from external to internal threats. Horn's story begins with the recent impact of a trauma and works backward and forward to reconstruct the incomplete fragments of the present into a more intelligible whole. This shows that the resolution of *King Horn*, which is likely to be expected, is never as important as the process of connecting and building a more meaningful account out of the fragments, both linguistically and thematically. It is not about the final consequence of Horn's dream, but about how the dream engages him in a process of recalling and reconstructing the past events of the whole poem, and how this gives an insight into the construction of his identity.

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<sup>23</sup> Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (New York: Harvard University Press), p. 94.



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### **The Contributor**

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